

- Reps. Gillibrand, Hall, Hinchey, Arcuri and McNulty ask USDA for assistance for farm families -

Washington, DC – Today, Reps. Gillibrand, Hall, Hinchey, Arcuri and McNulty asked Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer to encourage the USDA to help assess crop damage and to expeditiously approve the agricultural disaster declaration they receive from the State of New York. They also urged him to expedite the drafting of regulations for the permanent disaster program included in the recently passed Farm Bill to ensure that assistance will swiftly be made available for farms impacted by severe weather events.

"The Hudson Valley's farms are a linchpin of the region's prosperity. This storm has threatened to pull the rug right out from under them by adding yet another challenge to the competition and rising operating costs they already face," said Congressman Hall. "The USDA needs to make sure that our farms remain viable by acting swiftly to provide whatever assistance is necessary to respond to this calamitous weather."

Informal evidence suggests that as much as one third of New York's apple crop may have been damaged or destroyed and many of the damaged apples will have to be sold to the lower-priced processing market, resulting in serious financial losses for growers. In addition, it is possible that unseen damage to the skin of onions in New York's muck soil regions may lead to bacterial contamination and crop loss over the next few weeks, further exacerbating the storm's devastating impact on family farms.

"Fruit and vegetable farms are the backbone of our rural communities and when they suffer, the entire local economy suffers," said Congresswoman Gillibrand, a member of the House Agriculture Committee. "At a time when Upstate farmers are facing higher energy prices, operating costs, international competition, and development pressures the damage caused by this week's hail storm is even more devastating."

"Agriculture is extremely important to upstate New York and the rural districts we represent. This destructive weather has presented a serious threat to the integrity of the local farming industry and the families that depend on it for their wellbeing. It is absolutely critical that the Department of Agriculture respond quickly and effectively with a sufficient amount of resources and aid," Hinchey said.

The full text of the letter is below.

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June 19, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer

Secretary

United States Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Avenue SW

Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Schafer:

On June 16, 2008 New York experienced severe hail storms that have inflicted serious crop damage on farms throughout the state. New York's fruit and vegetable crops are among the main drivers of its agricultural economy and, while no official estimates are yet available, a growing amount of evidence indicates that the damage from this intense storm will have dire consequences for crop production and sales. In order to cushion the economic blow dealt by this storm, we urge you to assist the State of New York in assessing crop damage and to expeditiously approve any agricultural disaster declaration request you may receive from the

State of New York. We also urge you to expedite the drafting of regulations for the permanent disaster program included in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 to ensure that assistance will swiftly be made available for farms impacted by severe weather events.

Monday's storm has taken a toll on crops across the state, impacting program and specialty crop production in at least 15 counties from Western New York to the Hudson Valley. In addition to the effect of the large hail on strawberries, cherries, peaches, corn, soybeans, and other crops, informal evidence suggests that as much as one third of New York's apple crop may have been damaged or destroyed. Many apples that were not completely destroyed will now be forced from the eating market to the lower-priced processing market, resulting in serious financial losses for growers. In addition, it is possible that unseen damage to the skin of onions in New York's muck soil regions may lead to bacterial contamination and crop loss over the next few weeks, further exacerbating the storm's devastating impact on family farms.

At a time when farmers are facing higher energy prices, operating costs, international competition, and development pressures the damage caused by this week's hail storm presents a significant threat to the local farms that are the engines of New York's rural economy. In the face of such conditions, we believe that federal assistance is necessary and warranted. Accordingly, we urge you to provide assistance to the State of New York in order to quickly assess the full extent of crop damage and to approve any agricultural disaster declaration request received from the State of New York as a result of this storm.

As you know, the recently enacted Food, Conservation, and Energy Act for the first time established a standing disaster program to help ensure that in times of crisis farmers will no longer be forced to depend on ad hoc disaster packages. However, farmers cannot currently apply for assistance through this program due to the fact that regulations regarding the sign up process and program implementation have yet to be written. The fact that this program was enacted mere days after the severe hail storm that has wreaked havoc on New York's crop clearly indicates that there is an urgent and compelling need to get this program up and running as soon as possible. Accordingly, we also urge you to expedite the issuance of regulations to govern the permanent disaster program.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely, Rep. John Hall Rep. Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Rep. Maurice D. Hinchey Rep. Michael R. McNulty Rep. Michael A. Arcuri